

Message Text

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SUBJ: RADIO CORDAC BANNED IN BURUNDI

REF : BUJUMBURA 0203

1. REFERRING TO ITS FEBRUARY 28, 1977 DECREE ESTABLISHING A STATE MONOPOLY ON RADIO BROADCASTING (REFTTEL), THE BURUNDI INFORMATION MINISTER ISSUED AN ORDINANCE APRIL 22 BANNING RADIO CORDAC (AN AMERICAN PROTESTANT MISSIONARY RADIO STATION THAT HAS OPERATED IN BURUNDI FOR THIRTEEN AND ON HALF YEARS) FROM ANY FURTHER BROADCASTS, AND CALLING FOR THE DISMANTLEMENT OF RADIO CORDAC EQUIPMENT WITHIN TEN DAYS.

2. RADIO CORDAC DIRECTOR CHARLES KIRKPATRICK TOLD THE EMBASSY THAT THE APRIL 22 DECREE WAS TOTALLY UNEXPECTED AS NEGOTIATIONS HAD BEEN IN PROGRESS ON A SHARED ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND RADIO CORDAC FOR CONTINUING BROADCASTS UNDER THE FEBRUARY 28 DECREE. RADIO CORDAC WAS INFORMED BY PHONE OF THE APRIL 22 DECREE JUST BEFORE IT WAS ANNOUNCED.

3. MINISTER OF INFORMATION THARCICE RUHWIKIRA TOLD KIRK-

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PATRICK IN A MEETING APRIL 25 THAT HE HIMSELF HAD BEEN IN FAVOR OF WORKING OUT THE JOINT OPERATING ARRANGEMENT BUT THAT THE ORDER TO BAN FURTHER BROADCASTS HAD COME FROM ABOVE. (THE EMBASSY LEARNED FROM SEPARATE SOURCES THAT THOSE IN FAVOR OF THE ORIGINAL FEBRUARY 28 DECREE INCLUDED PRIME MINISTER NZAMBIMANA, INFORMATION MINISTER RUHWIKIRA, AGRICULTURAL MINISTER KAYIBIGI INTERIOR MINISTER NDIKUMANA

AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS MINISTER NZEYIMANA WHILE THOSE WHO HAVE FAVORED LETTING RADIO CORDAC ALONE INCLUDED PUBLICS WORKS MINISTER NYABEYA, FINANCE MINISTER SHIRAMANGA, TRANSPORT MINISTER BARUTWANAYO AND REPORTEDLY PRESIDENT BAGAZA HIMSELF.) KIRKPATRICK UNDERSTOOD FROM SEPARATE SOURCES THAT RUHWIKIRA SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN SINCERE IN HIS EFFORT TO NEGOTIATE A JOINT CORDAC/GRB ARRANGEMENT. KIRKPATRICK ALSO HAD UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT IT HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY THE UPRONA PARTY YOUTH ORGANIZATION, THE JRR, THAT HAD PRESSURED TOP GRB OFFICIALS TO IMPLEMENT THE ALL-OUT GOVERNMENT RADIO MONOPOLY BY ABOLISHING CORDAC FULLY.

4. KIRKPATRICK RECEIVED VERBAL ASSURANCES FROM THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION THAT CORDAC COULD CONTINUE ITS SECONDARY LEVEL RADIO SCHOOL (CORDAC ITSELF WILL PROBABLY RUN IT UNTIL THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR ONLY) AS WELL AS THE OPERATION OF A BOOKSTORE FOR RELIGIOUS BOOKS ON ITS PREMISES. AMERICAN MISSIONARIES WITH CORDAC WILL, ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION MINISTER, BE ALLOWED TO REMAIN IN BURUNDI TO PURSUE OTHER MISSIONARY PURSUITS. THE 35 BURUNDI EMPLOYEES ARE ALREADY ON THE UNEMPLOYMENT LITS OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOR, ALTHOUGH CORDAC PLANS TO COMPENSATE THEM WITH GENEROUS TERMINATION PAY.

5. ONE MISSIONARY FAMILY, THE STINSENS, WITH RADIO CORDAC DEPARTED APRIL 27 FROM BURUNDI BUT THEIR DEPARTURE WAS MORE FOR MEDICAL REASONS THAN BECAUSE OF THE LATEST DECREE. KIRKPATRICK HIMSELF WILL PROBABLY LEAVE ONCE HE HAS SUPERVISED THE SHUT DOWN OF RADIO CORDAC.
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6. KIRKPATRICK BELIEVED THAT RADIO CORDAC TRANSMITTERS AND BROADCASTING EQUIPMENT COULD BE TAKEN DOWN AND STORED WITHIN THE TEN DAY DEADLINE. THE GRB TOLD HIM THEY DID NOT WANT THE EQUIPMENT. CORDAC DOES NOT BELIEVE IT WORTH SHIPPING BACK TO THE U.S. AND MAY ULTIMATELY DESTROY IT UNLESS SOME USE FOR IT COULD BE FOUND IN A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY LIKE RWANDA. KIRKPATRICK MAY GO TO RWANDA EARLY IN MAY TO SEE WHETHER A MISSIONARY STATION COULD BE ESTABLISHED THERE.

7. THE INFORMATION MINISTER OFFERED VERBALLY A HALF HOUR PROGRAM TO THE PROTESTANTS ON THE GOVERNMENT'S VOIX DE LA REVOLUTION. KIRKPATRICK HOPES TO OBTAIN WRITTEN CONFIRMATION ON THIS OFFER AS WELL AS THE POINTS ABOUT THE SCHOOL, THE BOOKSTORE, AND THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF THE AMERICAN PERSONNEL.

8. COMMENT: THE SUDDEN ISSUANCE OF THE APRIL 22 ORDINANCE WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION WITH RADIO CORDAC--AND IN FACT

CONTRARY TO WHAT THE MINISTER OF INFORMATION HIMSELF HAD BEEN INDICATING TO THEM--IS UNFORTUNATELY TYPICAL OF SOME RECENT GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TOWARDS FOREIGN ACTIVITIES IN BURUNDI (E.G. THE APRIL 12 EXPULSION DECREE WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION WITH THE CATHOLIC HIERARCHY OF 16 ITALIAN PRIESTS FOR ALLEGED SUBVERSION). THE FACT THAT THE BURUNDI GOVERNMENT IS NOT EXPROPRIATING THE WELL DEVELOPED EQUIPMENT OF RADIO CORDAC WOULD INDICATE IT DID NOT WANT TO PAY COMPENSATION AND THAT IT CONSIDERED THE RECENT LIBYAN PROMISE TO PROVIDE A 150 KW SHORT WAVE TRANSMITTER FOR THE VOICE OF THE REVOLUTION RADIO NETWORK ADEQUATE FOR NEEDED IMPROVEMENT OF ITS OWN BROADCASTING FACILITIES.

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